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**Finding Hope in Hard Times**  
***“Hope from Our Past”***  
**April 25 & 26, 2009**  
(Part 2)

**Intro:** Video clip: The box

Today we are going to discover how to be free from the box of your past! We can't experience hope consistently if we are still living with the regrets and wounds of our past. How can we have hope for today and for our future if we are emotional prisoners to the past? Today we learn how to walk away. Today we learn how to be free.

- Let me give you 4 Biblical steps to freedom so you can hope from your past!

**I. We Find Hope in God's Complete Forgiveness**

A. Embrace God's forgiveness as all encompassing

*Col. 2:13-14 “You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for **he forgave all our sins**. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.” (NLT)*

*Ps. 103:11-12 “For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins **as far from us as the east is from the west**.” (NLT)*

1. It will be impossible for us to experience hope if we are not convinced we are completely forgiven before God. If we have the perspective that some sins from my past are not forgiven / will be remembered / cause me to be a 2<sup>nd</sup> class follower of Christ; how can we have hope?
2. Notice what the Scripture says: He forgave ALL our sins / He removed our sin as far as from the east to the west. In other words, “To infinity and beyond”! Your sins are no longer attached to you!
3. Some of you really struggle believing this. How do I know? Because many of you keep asking God to forgive you over and over again for things you did in your past. If this is what you're doing, you don't believe in God's forgiveness.
4. If God says you are forgiven then you are forgiven. You don't have to keep asking

Him over and over again. Forgiveness has been applied to your past. It's finished.

5. Today, some of you need to stop asking for His forgiveness for those past mistakes and start thanking Him by faith that you are forgiven. That is where you experience hope.

- This is all fine and well, but what about those daily struggles / those habits / attitudes / fleshly weaknesses we all battle every day? Where is God's forgiveness in all of this? These struggles and feelings just don't go away.

## B. Embrace God's forgiveness as never ending

*1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* (NLT) Every time!

1. God's forgiveness is not only applied to our past it is applied to our present. It is ongoing / continual / it is ever present / It is a constant gift we can experience in our relationship with God.
2. Knowing that you can always experience God's forgiveness for all your daily Struggles / failures / weaknesses / fills us with hope. Knowing that I can experience His forgiveness every time I fail gives me hope to start over / try again / not quit!
3. We need to reject the thinking that God is tired of hearing me ask for forgiveness for the same thing for the 1000<sup>th</sup> time! God knows that the transformation of our lives is a life-long process. Therefore, His forgiveness is applied to the entire process.
4. The only way our lives change is to embrace His forgiveness through the struggles and failures every time.

- **Illustrate:** Let's take a negative behavior / attitude / habit / that needs to change that is very ingrained into your life. It probably has years of being reinforced in your life. How easy do you think that will change? Typically, God doesn't just "zap" us and we no longer feel tempted or struggle with old lifestyle. It usually requires a process. WHY?
  5. The process keeps me coming back to God for what I need. Keeps me dependant on Him. Asking for forgiveness each time I fail re-connects me to His resources. Often, people quit too soon; they're tired of asking for forgiveness and certainly God must be tired of listening. NOT TRUE!
  6. It's only by continually going back to Jesus every time we fail is how our lives change. Stop going back to Him and your life stops changing. You may have failed 10 times today. Go back and seek forgiveness 10Xs! Tomorrow may be only 9! Next week may be only 6!
- Have you embraced God's complete, ongoing forgiveness? That's where there is hope. Will you simply believe what the word of God says?

## II. We Find Hope by Forgiving Ourselves

- It's one thing to believe God forgives you, but can you forgive yourself?

#### A. We must apply God's forgiveness to ourselves

*Rom. 4:6-8 "David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it: "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of sin." (NLT)*

1. The only people who experience happiness and joy in forgiveness are those who have applied it to themselves. Those who are not only forgiven but those who are free from their guilt of the past.
  2. Some of you are struggling with hope today because you are packing around enormous amounts of guilt from your past. Guilt is a joy robber / a happiness killer / it will steal your hope.
  3. Guilt can cause people to do strange things. Sarah Winchester story: (share) Sarah was a woman who could never forgive herself, and it drove her mad!
  4. What about you? Have you applied God's forgiveness to yourself? Have you released yourself from the mistakes of your past?
- So how do I forgive myself? Besides embracing what God says in His word...

#### B. We must stop trying to pay for our sin

*Heb. 10:18 "And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices." (NLT)* Now, this is referring to the old sacrificial system of the OT, but there is a principal we can apply. We must quit trying to pay for our sin / mistakes.

1. Forgiveness is based upon the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. All payment for sin has been made. There is no longer any payment required for our sin. Yet, guilt can cause us to think we should be punished somehow for our behavior. It can cause us to think we should make some type of sacrifice (work in nursery for 2 yrs.)
2. If we are going to apply God's forgiveness to ourselves, we must release ourselves from all behaviors that are motivated by trying to make up for our past mistakes. Jesus already did this! No more payment is required!
3. If your car is paid off, and you hold the title, why would you keep sending them money? Yet this is what so many followers of Christ do. They don't embrace the hope of their forgiveness and still feel motivated to pay for their sin somehow.
4. Hope is experienced as we apply God's forgiveness to ourselves and forgive ourselves completely! This doesn't excuse any of our wrong behavior of the past, it just sets us free from our past so we can move forward in hope.
5. Until we forgive ourselves, we are emotionally stuck in the past. We are emotional prisoners to our mistakes. God doesn't remember your past anymore, why should you!

### III. We Find Hope by Forgiving Others

- Sometimes the pain of our past is the result of being wounded by others.

*Col. 3:13 "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." (NLT)*

- I realize God wants us to forgive, but why?
  - A. Forgiveness sets us free from the offenders of our past
    1. We have all been wounded by other people in some way and in some degree. We've been betrayed / lied to / abandoned / abused / used / rejected. We all have the option to hang onto this hurt and resentment or choose to forgive. Why should I forgive people who have hurt me so deeply?
    2. **Illustrate:** Use giant teddy bear – have sign that reads “Offender” – tie the bear to your leg with rope. Walk around the platform dragging the offender wherever you go.
    3. Until we choose to forgive, we are emotionally tied to the person who wounded us. We literally take them with us wherever we go / whoever we're with / Where is the HOPE in this lifestyle?
    4. Forgiveness liberates us from those who hurt us. Forgiveness cuts the cord!
  - Some of you struggle with hope today because you're still tied to the ones who hurt you in the past. Maybe it's time to cut the cord! God doesn't ask us to forgive because so that we let people off the hook. He tells us to forgive so we can be free!
- B. Forgiveness sets the standard for future relationships
 

*Matt. 18:21-22 “Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!” (NLT) Forgiveness needs to be a constant factor in healthy relationships.*

  1. Relationships that have the built in expectation of forgiveness before it's ever needed end up having very secure relationships. Thus, they experience more hope. Relationships where you are expected to be perfect result in insecure relationships, which end up being more hopeless.
  2. It just makes sense that flawed imperfect people have forgiveness built into all their existing relationships. How hypocritical of us who are not perfect, to expect others to be. Then, when they fail us, we judge them and resent their imperfections!
  3. We can't move forward in hope using the same relational standards from our past that got us in this hopeless mess. We must embrace new ones and forgiveness if the key that results in hope.
  - Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to be free from today?

#### IV. We Find Hope by Embracing God's Purpose

- How do I embrace God's purpose?
  - A. Believe God has a destiny for you to fulfill
 

*Eph. 2:10 “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (NLT)*

    1. Many people have no hope because they reflect on their life and conclude it has

little or no meaning. They are stuck reflecting upon their past wondering about the significance of it all. This causes them to lose hope in the future.

- **City Slicker** clip. Billy Crystal – Mid life crisis (explain clip – career day)
  2. In order to have hope from our past we must have hope about our future. No matter how bad you think your past was, God still has purposes and plans for you to discover. That's hope! Don't stay stuck in the past! Embrace God's future!
  3. Every person has a destiny they can discover from God. We are His workmanship. He prepared work for us to do in eternity past. Before the creation of the world, He purposed things for you to do.
  4. I do not believe it is ever too late to begin discovering and walking in your God ordained destiny. Our past does not have to dictate our future. God has a specific purpose for you to discover and walk in.

BUT, if this is going to be true, then...

B. Forget your past and reach for the goal

*Phil. 3:12-14 "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**" (NIV)*

1. It was the apostle Paul who wrote this. He ought to know about forgetting the past. Before becoming a follower of Christ, He was a persecutor of the church. He had people arrested and executed for following Jesus. If anyone had a good reason to be hopeless because of His past it was Paul.
2. You may feel guilty about your past but I guarantee you that none of you were as bad as Paul. You don't have the blood of #'s of innocent people on your hands. You weren't responsible for trying to destroy Christianity.
3. Yet this is the guy that God used to turn the world upside down. God used Him to write the majority of our NT. This would never have been possible unless Paul was able to forget the past and reach for God's goal for him.
4. Your past does not disqualify God from using you. Your past does NOT define who you are today in Christ! If God can have a destiny for a murderer, He can have one for you too! That's hope! If we are willing to let God forgive us from our past, we can embrace His new destiny for us in the future. Listen to God!

*Jer. 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, **plans to give you hope and a future.**" (NLT)*

5. Maybe it's time to believe the word of God today and stop listening to the voices inside your head that are telling you it's hopeless. You've come to a church where you can begin to discover what God has in store for you. We are committed to helping you.

6. This is why we have a series of classes to help people with this process (101 -201-301 classes – explain). We want you to forget your past and reach forward to purpose God has for you.
- Do you need hope from your past today? Are you ready to be free from the box of regret...the box of your past? Will you embrace God's complete forgiveness? Will you finally forgive yourself? Will you forgive those who have wounded you? And will you begin to embrace and discover God's purpose for your life...knowing it's never too late!